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An adequate merchant
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AN ADEQUATE MERCHANT MARINE
An Indispensable Factor in the Expansion of Our Foreign Trade
and for National Security

By ALFRED H. HAAG

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of Foreign Service

Probably the most vital issue confronting the American people to-day is the much-discussed shipping problem.

The apparent lack of appreciation on the part of the American people of this issue is primarily due to the insidious propaganda that is and has been waged against any move toward the establishment of a permanent and adequate merchant marine owned, controlled, and operated by the American people. It is high time that they realize that most articles which have been published opposing the upbuilding of our merchant marine are nothing more or less than artful foreign propaganda.

American ships of commerce are an economic necessity, and an indispensable factor as an auxiliary to our Navy in times of national emergency.

It is inconceivable that the richest nation in the world, with a wealth of \$400,000,000,000 and an international trade of almost \$10,000,000,000 annually, with freight revenues for transporting this trade amounting to \$600,000,000 per annum, can not support a merchant marine of the best equipped and most suitable types of vessels sufficient to carry the greater portion of its commerce. The fact is that to-day 70 per cent of our international trade is carried in foreign-flag ships.

Flag-waving arguments have no effect in influencing American shippers to use American-flag ships and will have none until such time as our flag waves from the ensign staff of a ship offering the same advantages in speed, regularity, and frequency of sailings as that offered by our competitors. Not until that time can we be assured of the full support of American shippers; nor is it fair or reasonable for us to expect them to accept inferior commercial service under the guise of patriotism.

The postwar trend has been toward cargo-liner service—that is, a port to port service—in contradistinction to tramp service; and this service now represents 75 per cent of the world's merchant tonnage. Our competitors were quick to recognize this trend and have either built or acquired modern tonnage with increased speeds and other economic advantages, so that to-day we are far behind in this respect.

During the period from 1921 to 1926, the principal maritime nations built for transoceanic service vessels of 2,000 gross tons and over, totaling approximately as follows:

| Country | Vessels | Gross tons |
|---------------|---------|------------|
| Great Britain | 600 | 3,500,000 |
| Germany | 172 | 950,000 |
| Italy | 63 | 506,000 |
| France | 72 | 450,000 |
| Japan | 52 | 250,000 |
| United States | 14 | 137,000 |
| Total | 973 | 5,793,000 |

Or for every single ship of this class that the United States has built Great Britain has approximately 42, Germany 12, France 5, Italy 4, and Japan 4.

Of ships building or contracted for at the present time, of the same class and service, the records disclose the following:

| Country | Vessels | Gross tons |
|---------------|---------|------------|
| Great Britain | 142 | 980,000 |
| Germany | 49 | 395,000 |
| Italy | 28 | 300,000 |
| Japan | 19 | 100,000 |
| United States | 4 | 63,000 |
| France | 8 | 58,000 |
| Total | 250 | 1,896,000 |

Or for every single ship of this class that the United States is building or has contracted for at the present time Great Britain has 35, Germany 12, Italy 7, Japan 5, and France 2.

Another striking comparison is in the number and speed of vessels, suitable for transoceanic service, registered under the flag of the principal maritime nations.

| Ships of 12 knots and over: | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Great Britain | 1,308 |
| France | 255 |
| United States | 237 |
| Japan | 180 |
| Italy | 188 |
| Germany | 180 |

In this class we rank third, being outclassed by our principal competitor, Great Britain, 5 to 1.

| Ships of 14 knots and over: | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Great Britain | 432 |
| United States | 103 |
| France | 71 |
| Italy | 56 |
| Japan | 53 |
| Germany | 31 |

We rank second in this class, being outnumbered by Great Britain 4 to 1.

Ships of 16 knots and over:

| | |
|---------------|-----|
| Great Britain | 152 |
| United States | 39 |
| France | 25 |
| Japan | 25 |
| Germany | 10 |
| Italy | 8 |

Here we rank second, Great Britain outclassing us about 4 to 1.

Ships of 18 knots and over:

| | |
|---------------|----|
| Great Britain | 35 |
| Italy | 10 |
| France | 7 |
| United States | 7 |
| Germany | 3 |
| Japan | 2 |

We rank third in this class, outnumbered by Great Britain 5 to 1.

Ships of 20 knots and over:

| | |
|---------------|----|
| Great Britain | 16 |
| Italy | 8 |
| France | 5 |
| United States | 3 |
| Japan | 2 |
| Germany | 2 |

And in this class Great Britain attains an advantage of 5 to 1.

The foregoing illustrates very definitely our weakness in efficient ocean carriers compared with our principal competitor nations. Even Germany has been able to establish herself as a formidable competitor in the world's trade routes. In her fleet of to-day over 60 per cent of her total tonnage is less than 5 years old, with the economic supremacy that implies.

We seem to be content to operate ships which were constructed to meet a war emergency, and unless a policy of replacement is adopted immediately we shall soon fade from the picture and again have to rely on our active competitors to carry our commerce to and from the ports of the world.

American shipping costs more, due to higher construction and operating costs; and we are adding to that handicap by operating obsolete types of vessels in competition with the faster and more modern types of our competitors.

It is vitally necessary to embark immediately on a new construction program to provide our nation with competitive types of commerce carriers and at the same time save our shipbuilding industry from absolute failure.

Shipyards of our country have long been on a starvation diet and we can not, either from an economic or protective point of view, permit this industry to decline.

It seems rather inconsistent for this Nation to have scrapped 850,000 tons of naval vessels (many of them the most modern types of fighting ships), and with it world naval supremacy, at a cost of almost \$400,000,000 and then hold on like grim death to obsolete types of merchant ships while other nations have disposed of their inefficient ships without delay.

At the Washington arms conference in 1922, the United States made a sincere effort to assist other nations to curtail their expenditures by acquiescing in the apparent desire for world disarmament;

and we proved our absolute sincerity in agreeing to and complying with the scrapping program.

We even consented to one of the Washington treaty nations constructing capital ships after the Washington conference, thereby providing work for its shipyards. In addition to this, when we glance over the world's shipbuilding activities for the past five years, we find all the nations who participated in the treaty have far out-built this country in combatant types of vessels. And to-day we are considerably below the naval strength agreed to at the Washington arms conference, which in spirit and principle was intended to cover all types of fighting ships.

The American people most certainly felt that the strength of their Navy should be, at least, the equal of that of any of the Washington treaty nations. But after five years we find that we are trailing far behind.

It is astounding the progress our competitor nations have made in the upbuilding of their merchant and naval fleets, particularly since the signing of the Washington treaty; and it would be rather interesting to know how far American dollars have aided other nations in the strengthening of their sea power.

Of the \$12,000,000,000 in private American loans it is reasonable to assume that American dollars have aided these nations considerably in furnishing their shipyards with work in the construction of modern commerce carriers with which American flag ships must compete; and American dollars, no doubt, are playing an important rôle in the strengthening of their navies.

Added to these activities in foreign shipyards, we are still further aiding them by numerous contracts which have been placed abroad for American account.

Under these conditions, how can our shipbuilding industry survive?

It would seem that, after all, "Uncle Sam Shylock" is a most liberal individual in assisting his friends across the seas and it is high time that some consideration be given to our problems at home, particularly that of our sea power, which vitally affects the welfare of the entire Nation, both from an economic standpoint as well as that of national security.

If our Nation is to continue to prosper it is highly essential that the American people awaken to the fact that American ships of commerce are an absolute necessity, not only to insure American industries uninterrupted ocean transportation in carrying their surplus products to the markets of the world, but to insure the continuous flow of our inbound commerce which is essential for the maintenance of many of our industries.

In the matter of national defense it is obviously necessary that we have an adequate fleet of commerce carriers to support our Navy, as it is the combined strength of both the naval and merchant fleet that reflects the sea power. They are one and inseparable and if we are to live up to the American traditions and ideals *our sea power must be second to none.*

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